

**THE
RUMROLLER
LEE MORGAN**



WITH JOE HENDERSON RONNIE MATHEWS VICTOR SPROLES
AND BILLY HIGGINS

STEREO
THE FINEST IN JAZZ SINCE 1939

84199 BLUE NOTE

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RUMPROL

EE MORGAN

Midline

THE RUMROLLER LEE MORGAN

LEE MORGAN, trumpet; JOE HENDERSON, tenor sax; RONNIE MATHEWS, piano;
 VICTOR SPROLES, bass; BILLY HIGGINS, drums.

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| <p>1. THE RUMROLLER
 (Andrew Hill) Blue Horizon Music—BMI</p> <p>2. DESERT MOONLIGHT
 (Lee Morgan) Nom Music — BMI</p> | <p>1. ECLIPSO
 (Lee Morgan) Nom Music — BMI</p> <p>2. EDDA
 (Wayne Shorter) Miyako Music — BMI</p> <p>3. THE LADY
 (Rudy Stevenson) Rudy Stevenson Music — BMI</p> |
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A YEAR or so ago, when I was assigned to write the liner notes for Lee Morgan's *The Sidewinder*, I commented that the album marked this brilliant young trumpeter's return to the studios for Blue Note after a fairly long absence. It was clear that the recordings made in celebration of that reunion constituted a splendid, hard-driving jazz album. What was far less obvious at the time was that here came a hit — for Lee Morgan, for Blue Note, for all concerned.

For many of us in music it becomes a weekly habit to read the trade papers *Billboard* and *Cash Box*. The weekly perusal became a pleasure, and a totally unpredicted one, when suddenly, surrounded by folk singers, rock 'n' roll vocal groups and Hollywood string ensembles, Lee Morgan and *The Sidewinder* made their appearance in the listings of the country's best selling albums. As the weeks and months went by, the album shot slowly but surely higher.

The success of *The Sidewinder* is a reassuringly happy event for good music. In the business end of the music world a number of Monday morning quarterbacks are analyzing and explaining its success, but actually there is no one answer. All you can say is that the title number had a certain appeal, partly in the tune itself, partly in that unforgettably catchy rhythm section figure that went along with it. (The figure, by the way, has been sedulously imitated, without credit to Mr. Morgan, by some of our less principled second-string second-raters.)

Be that as it may, *The Sidewinder* kept on winding its way upside that chart. And it wouldn't surprise me at all to see the same fate befall *The Rumproller*.

The combo on this new album has the same instrumentation as its illustrious predecessor, and the identical front line — Lee and tenor saxophonist Joe Henderson — as well as the same drummer, the dynamic and dependable Billy Higgins. With the impressive help of Ronnie Mathews at the piano, and with some truly remarkable bass work by Victor Sproles, Lee has himself a group that is, I feel, the equal of any he has yet recorded with.

Sproles, incidentally, is a colleague of Lee's in the Jazz Messengers, the group Lee rejoined just about the time *The Sidewinder* was recorded last year (1964). When the record became a hit, there was widespread talk that Lee would follow in the footsteps of other Art Blakey alumni — Horace Silver, Donald Byrd, Jackie McLean, Bobby Timmons et al — by forming his own group. But as these words go to press he is in the second year of his second time around with the Messengers, whom he originally joined in September of 1958.

An odd thing about *The Rumproller* is that this composition was written by Andrew Hill. Not that it should be considered out of character for any musician who has paid his normal musical dues to be able to write in the language of Basic Blues; it's just that his present association as one of the most important figures in the jazz "cosa nova", or new thing or avant-garde, makes Andrew's role as writer of this funky blues a little unexpected.

As with *The Sidewinder*, the 12-bar blues is stretched to 24 bars. Again there is a somewhat unexpected harmonic turn toward the end (those wistful changes at the last four measures of each 24). Note Sproles' important role during the ensemble statement, as well as Billy Higgins' show of verve and extroversion. Ronnie Mathews' piano provides a richly chord-textured carpet for Lee Morgan's fluent solo to glide on.

Joe Henderson's solo achieves great intensity right near the start through the intelligent use of repetition-with-variations. The influence here is close to rhythm-and-blues (and there's nothing wrong with that — where, after all, did Ray Charles come from?), as well as the harmonic sensitivity that shows Joe's equally firm roots in contemporary jazz. After Mathews' soulful solo there comes a delightful diversion by Sproles—dig that big fat sound, and that wild glissando! The final ensemble leads to a long, slow fade with admirable after-hours piano. When it's over, you feel as if you've spent ten and a half minutes bathing in the blues.

Next comes a fairly bright-paced, minor theme by Lee called *Desert Moonlight*. Now why didn't they use this kind of soundtrack music for *Lawrence of Arabia*? Notice how eloquently and unhesitatingly Lee tells his story on this one — like a speech-maker whose gift of gab is second nature, who never has to hesitate or stop to drink a sip of water, cough, or turn the page. Henderson, too, makes the most of these attractive changes. As for Ronnie Mathews, just choose your term — agility, facility, mobility . . . whatever it is, with it go swing and just the right dosage of funk.

Eclipso opens with a neat variation of the bossa nova figure, then moves into a sort of pecking calypsoish theme that adds another important item to Lee's list of composer credits. Sproles sprawls all over the place with those fine sounds, yet never steps awkwardly in anyone else's path. Joe Henderson comes on as muscular as the cat who sells Granny Goose, and far more convincing. As for Lee, just name it and it's there — jazz, bossa nova, calypso, soul, humor, blues, all in one brilliantly executed and perfectly wrapped package. Mathews follows in his groove-steps. An ensemble with a bigger, harmonized sound leads into a reprise of the original, quieter thematic statement.

Edda was composed by Wayne Shorter, a longtime fellow-Messenger who left Blakey in the summer of 1964 to join Miles Davis. Technically it's a fast waltz, but it comes on like a tiger, which is certainly no three-footed animal. Henderson's amazing control of the horn is especially impressive on this track.

The Lady was written by Rudy Stevenson in memory of Billie Holiday. Stevenson has written material for Mel Torme, Wynton Kelly and Nina Simone, among others, and has recently been working with Miss Simone, playing guitar, alto sax and flute. Mathews' introduction is followed by a muted, subdued Lee Morgan solo on this poignantly moving ballad. Ronnie's solo is very melodic and Lee's closing statement goes into a long, suspenseful a capella cadenza.

The unflagging inspiration and dependability of Lee Morgan's work, here as on the other albums he has made in recent years, move me to recall an incident that took place once when I was recording a session in which he took part.

Lee was delayed in reaching the studio. Assuming he might not get there, I called around and found another trumpet player. The other man was a capable musician, played good blues, and when he read the parts the notes all seemed to be correct, yet somehow it didn't sound quite right. There was a certain element missing.

Then Lee showed up, took over, and read the same part. The difference was startling. More than ever before the quality of his sound, the delicacy of his phrasing, and the whole level of his control of the horn were brought home to me.

That intangible yet all-important quality is the stamp of greatness in jazz as in all the arts — the thin line that separates not just the men from the boys, but the workman from the artisan, and competence from command. Listen to *The Rumproller* and you'll hear the evidence presented again — strong, clear and true, in the style that brought Lee Morgan to the front rank of American jazz.

— LEONARD FEATHER

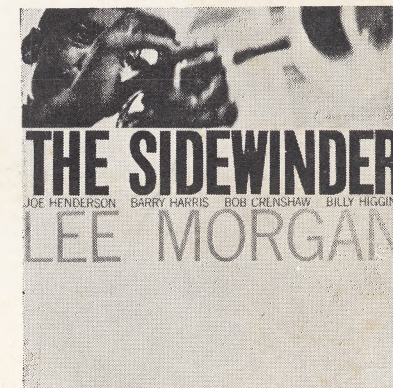
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Ronnie Mathews performs by courtesy of Prestige Records.

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THE RUMROLLER
LEE MORGAN

Stereo
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Blue Note

Side 1

- 1. THE RUMROLLER**
(Andrew Hill) Blue Horizon Music - BMI
- 2. DESERT MOONLIGHT**
(Lee Morgan) Nom Music - BMI

Lee Morgan-Joe Henderson-
Ronnie Mathews-Victor Sproles-
Billy Higgins

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THE RUMROLLER
LEE MORGAN

Stereo
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Blue Note

Side 2

1. **ECLIPSO**
(Lee Morgan) Nom Music - BMI
2. **EDDA**
(Wayne Shorter) Miyako Music - BMI
3. **THE LADY**
(Rudy Stevenson) Rudy Stevenson Music - BMI

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